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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000579

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SUBJECT: EU REACTION TO BURMA POLICY REVIEW UPDATE

REF: STATE 33547

BRUSSELS 00000579 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: USEU Pol M-C Chris Davis for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Brussels-based EU officials working on Burma policy issues appreciated receiving reftel points on the status of the ongoing U.S. policy review. Although the EU still intends a straight rollover of its Common Position and restrictive measures, Foreign Ministers may issue politically forward-leaning written policy conclusions at their next meeting of the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) on April 27-28. In presentations to the Political and Security Committee and EU Member State Asia Directors on April 7-8, EU Special Representative for Burma Pietro Fassino made an impassioned plea for increased EU engagement with the Burmese regime, and urged Member States to accept the 2010 elections on the premise that bad elections are better than no elections. The EU is eager for the policy review to conclude and would like to work closely with the U.S. on our new approach. End summary.

12. (C) Poloff delivered reftel points to Seamus Gillespie, Head of Unit for South-East Asia at the European Commission; Leo Nordholt Schulte, Desk Officer for Burma at the European Council General Secretariat; and to Asia officers at the Czech, UK, and Dutch Permanent Representations to the EU. All interlocutors welcomed the information and urged close cooperation on Burma as the review process winds down.

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April GAERC preview  
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13. (C) Schulte, Gillespie, and the Czech Perm Rep confirmed that Ministers plan to roll over the Common Position on Burma, which contains restrictive measures and sanctions at the April 27-28 GAERC meeting in Luxembourg. They report that the EU's position will be unchanged, save for the addition and update of a few named individuals and entities.

14. (C) Originally led to believe that the roll over of the Common Position would take without discussion, we are now advised by the Czech Presidency to expect detailed GAERC conclusions calling for the following:

-- Reform of the UN Good Offices mission,

-- Extension of the Tripartite Core Group,  
-- Cooperation and coordination with regional partners,  
-- Readiness for the EU to react to developments on the ground,  
-- Release of Aung San Suu Kyi,  
-- Free and fair elections with full participation from all political actors.

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Fassino's star rises  
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15. (C) Pietro Fassino, the EU Special Representative for Burma, reportedly made an impassioned plea to the Political and Security Committee and to Member State Asia Directors on April 7 and 8, respectively. Telling Member State reps that the sanctions were not working, Fassino called for a new approach. Fassino said he wanted the EU to be more active and willing to engage, and was backed up by the Italians, who said that they found it incredible that the EU met with the North Koreans at a more senior and substantive level than with the Burmese.

16. (C) Fassino also asserted that the EU needed to be prepared to accept the 2010 Burmese elections, despite inevitable flaws. Arguing that bad elections were better than no elections, he pointed to Indonesia as an example of a country that made much progress after flawed national elections. (Note: We urged the Czech Presidency to avoid endorsing 2010 elections in their conclusions; internal EU debate continues. End Note) Fassino asked for greater authority to lead EU policy formulation on Burma and advocated for the EU to extend greater incentives toward the regime for good behavior. Uneasy with Fassino's calls for

BRUSSELS 00000579 002 OF 002

enhanced incentives and forward-leaning GAERC conclusions, the UK's Asia Director pushed back, and urged colleagues to maintain restraint while awaiting the results of the USG policy review. The British were backed by Denmark and the Netherlands, although both are typically softer on Burma.

17. (C//NF) Gillespie, Schulte, and the UK's Brussels-based Asia officer tell us that Fassino, who was generally poorly regarded and thought to be somewhat naive, seems to have improved his standing among Member States with last week's strong interventions.

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EU willing to await U.S. conclusions  
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18. (C//NF) Contacts were universally pleased at the prospect of a new U.S. approach to Burma. While some Member States remain skeptical of sanctions in general, most were supportive of U.S. reported plans for dialogue with the regime and increased assistance, while maintaining pressure for democratic and human rights reforms. The UK, France, Netherlands, Sweden, and Denmark wanted the EU to remain firm, with France pointing out that the United States could more easily talk to the ruling junta via military-to-military channels. Germany and Austria argued that the EU should be more pragmatic about how to reduce the military role over time and were generally soft on the way forward. The European Commission would be eager to coordinate closely on new or enhanced assistance programs, and disclosed that their Bangkok-based aid workers enjoy easy access to nearly every corner of the country. Likeminded Member States indicated a willingness to listen to the results of the U.S. policy review and revisit their own policy later this year. Southern European states, led by Germany and Italy, are pushing for GAERC conclusions now that would encourage dialogue and development assistance.

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Czech confusion leads to detailed conclusions  
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19. (C//NF) Brussels-based EU institutional and Member State contacts revealed that the Czech Presidency showed poor internal coordination regarding the question of GAERC conclusions on the Common Position rollover. One contact in the Council Secretariat told us that he sent strongly worded draft conclusions to Member States for comment on a recent Friday, upon instructions from the Czech Presidency in Prague over his objections. Subsequently, the Czech Asia Director disagreed with his subordinate's decision to sign out the draft conclusions, and contacted the Council Secretariat to instruct them to cancel the message. The message had already been sent, however, and with Fassino's strengthening performance and the mistaken release of the draft, Member States decided to press ahead with detailed conclusions, instead of the short comment on the rollover that we had initially anticipated.

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